


CHARLES DARWIN • CREATION • THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED

FEBRUARY 2009

Forward in Christ

God's wisdom, WELS' witness

In the
Beginning



"What he did
wasn't right!"

"HE WAS WRONG!
BUT DON'T HOLD ON TO
THE HURT. FORGIVE HIM."

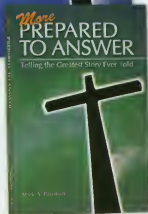
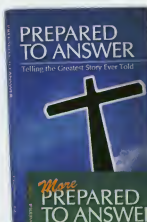
"But it's just
something I'll
never be able
to forgive."

"YOU KNOW, JESUS SHOWED
PETER ABOUT REFUSING
TO FORGIVE. LET ME
TELL YOU A STORY..."

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It's not just Genesis that tells the story, but all of Scripture asserts the creative power of God.



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Forward in Christ

✝ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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LET US TELL YOU A STORY!



The Russian Synod Council recently accepted a young man named Aleksei into the seminary program! Aleksei has been a faithful member of the Novosibirsk congregation for the past three years. Just after Aleksei was accepted into the program, Pastor John Sullivan (retired missionary, now volunteering) arrived to teach an intensive Bible Institute course for leaders in the church. What perfect timing!

The seminary program begins with two years of Bible Institute classes and is followed by three years of seminary classes and service as a vicar. It is just right for the beginning of Aleksei's training.

Pastor Sullivan is teaching an overview of the New Testament. The class meets every day for four hours, and they have quite a bit of reading for homework. It's really an excellent group meeting for the class. The group includes two of the deaconesses, the humanitarian aid manager, Akademgorodok's church president, Aleksei, Aleksei's wife (Galina), Raffik (a young man who is considering studying for the ministry), Jason (a WELS Kingdom Worker volunteer), and Maria Sullivan.

The course lasts for six weeks; then Aleksei will continue his classroom training with Pastor Igor Logvinov and Missionary Luke Wolfgramm.

written by Miss Jennifer Wolfgramm

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BE WITH US AS HE WAS
WITH OUR FATHERS;
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US
NOR FORSAKE US.
1 Kings 8:57

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FEBRUARY

WHAT'S INSIDE

by Julie Wietzke

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Pretty cut and dry, huh? The Bible couldn't be much plainer. Yet how the world and everything in it came into being has become a hotly debated topic. This month you might hear even more about it because it is the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth.

We at *Forward in Christ* decided that we would also participate in the discussion. This month we are starting a four-part series written by Paul Boehlke, a WELS biology professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, that will take a historical and scientific look—from a Lutheran perspective—at the creation/evolution debate. The first article looks at the life of Charles Darwin. It gives some insight on how events in Darwin's life and in the world at the time influenced his thinking on natural selection (p.12).

Throughout the rest of the magazine, you also will find other articles on this important topic. Our goal is not to be argumentative but to give praise where praise is due—to the Maker of heaven and earth.

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Life at the foot of the mountain

"If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Mark 9:22

Peter A. Panitzke

"Mountain top" experiences are memorable events. The transfiguration was one. Peter, James, and John saw Jesus in his heavenly glory. It was a great experience! Peter wanted it to last longer. "Let us put up three shelters" (Mark 9:5).

Our faith is often weak

The trouble with "mountain top" experiences is that they come to an end, often abruptly! After experiencing the glory of the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples experienced the power of Satan at the foot of the mountain: "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not. . . . From childhood . . . it has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him" (Mark 9:17,18,21,22).

Why weren't the apostles able to drive out this demon? Jesus had given them that authority (Mark 6:7). What made this situation different?

Jesus diagnosed the problem. When the disciples asked him privately why they couldn't drive it out, he replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20,21).

We all face hopeless cases that make our confidences waver. It could be a financial crisis or any other personal crisis. Illness in the family or loneliness could drain any joy we had on the mountain top.

How often aren't we like the father in this account? "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us" (Mark 9:22). We approach God with questions in our hearts. We hate to admit it, but doubts are there too. Does he really want to help us? Can he really help us?

The Lord has mercy on us

Listen to Jesus respond to the father and to us: " 'If you can'? . . . Everything is possible for him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

The father then makes a beautiful confession. It is a confession of sin. In effect he said, "I have failed to obey the very first commandment. I have failed to trust in you, Jesus, above all things." It is also a confession of faith. "You are the Messiah who has come to save us."

"[Lord,] I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

You know how the story ends. Jesus speaks the word. Satan cannot withstand it. The boy is healed. Satan is defeated.

If the Lord has blessed you with a mountain top experience lately, give him praise and glory. But realize that much of your life will be spent at the



foot of the mountain confronted by Satan's power. At the foot of the mountain, remember that Jesus did not cast his disciples away for their weakness of faith. He did not ignore the father's plea. Instead he had mercy on them. He has mercy on you. The almighty God of the mountain top came down to the foot of the mountain into Satan's domain so that he could die for you. He is the God who hears you at the foot of the mountain and answers your prayer: "[Lord,] I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Contributing editor Peter Panitzke is pastor at St. Paul, Muskego, Wisconsin.

Left behind

Thomas J. Jeske

The smell of the stockyards lingers in this old neighborhood. Do you think the woman who lived in this little house would have noticed?

Perhaps she came over with so many others who were sponsored at the end of World War II. She could have walked to the big parish that served Polish immigrant families.

Houses here are all painted white. Not much in architecture or trim suggests that the long-ago builder wanted to close with a flourish, to put a personal signature on gable or brickwork.

"Estate Sale. Enter at Rear," says a sign on the lawn. The back hall shelf holds flashlights, cleaning products, and garden gloves.

In her tiny kitchen, a south window provides good light on the table, but four chairs are a tight squeeze. Pale green glass glimmers among her everyday coffee cups. A flax-colored linen table runner lies folded there. Would the lady of the house have embroidered it had she known its value would only be \$4?

Woodwork in the house is varnished pine. The moldings are still sharp with no evidence of ever having been scuffed or scratched by furniture repeatedly being moved in and out.

Bathrooms? One, central. Two bedrooms, each 10x10. A dresser, a little wooden stand, a bed. By what right am I peeking in here at a Baby Ben wind-up alarm clock with luminescent hands? Her prayer books are within reach.

In the front room is the table of good stuff. A person I mentally identify as a dealer is quietly, quickly, and deftly sorting through the trays. He'll be having lunch somewhere in an hour, thinking about the piece that paid for his run over here from a downtown shop.

Glass Christmas ornaments wink at her final houseguests. These ornaments somehow made it

here from time past: the star-spear, French horn, little cabin, and bird with a real feather tail.

Steep stairs descend from back hall to basement. Here's where Daddy had his workbench. His tools are picked over now, and cans of his hardware are pulled together all for one price. Over at the laundry tub, bars of Fels-Naptha soap in orange wrappers still wait to do their duty. A jumble in the corner suggests that the mistress of this house had difficulty disposing of tomato baskets, the old wooden kind. It occurs to me that one day soon people at my estate sale will see what I saved: "Look what he kept!"

"Estate Sale" is a little too grand for what is happening here today. "Rummage" comes closer. That is exactly what this small crowd was doing on a Friday morning on the south side. One human being's possessions gathered over decades, a small museum of one life, are being scattered to the winds. It strikes me that sometime soon mine will travel away in boxes and used plastic bags too.

Sale posters throughout the house and yard are printed in several languages and inform both scavengers and the simply curious that the cash register is on the front porch, that those traipsing up and down and under and through and over the widow's things should watch their step, and that all sales are final.

Christian, we get just a little time here. A geographical spot receives us for a while.

For some it's a house, for some an apartment, for some just a storage unit and a flight bag. What will be left behind you?

"Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come" (Psalm 71:18).

Christian, we get just a little time here. . . . What will be left behind you?

Contributing editor Thomas Jeske is pastor at Living Hope, Omaha, Nebraska.

QUESTION & ANSWER



Forrest L. Bivens

With your question you mentioned that this month marks the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth (Feb. 12, 1809) and observed that evolutionists will likely use this event to promote their worldview. Then you asked if we plan to promote our worldview as a countermeasure.

Our witness to the world includes a rejection of Darwinian evolution. Sharing our beliefs with the world exposes people to the basis of our worldview, a word you wisely used in your question. A worldview is a person's set of assumptions about the basic makeup and nature of the world and universe—and a person's place and purpose in it. A fully developed worldview gives answers to life's basic questions. The worldview based on Darwinian thought differs mightily from that drawn from the Scriptures with its creation account. People should understand this.

The Darwinian worldview

Historical evolution assumes that all observable occurrences can be explained by natural forces. The physical universe is the result of natural forces, and no supernatural being (God) or activity (miracles) played a role in this. Based on this primary assumption, a worldview emerges: the universe and humankind came into being through natural phenomena, and there is really no alternate way they could have developed.

Incompatible with this worldview is the concept of a Creator, of humanity as the crown of creation, or of the truths of law and gospel. There is no sin, no objective right or wrong, and no Savior or salvation from the guilt of sin. There is no justification or sanctification as gifts from God, only variable opinions on what is good and bad and why humans do such things. Applications of the theory of natural selection to social, political, and economic issues (Social Darwinism) logically stem from such a worldview.

The biblical worldview

A biblical and Christian worldview assumes that the Bible is God's inspired and authoritative revelation of truth. What the Bible says about the origin and nature of the universe and humankind is true, reliable, and sufficient. God

Q. What are we doing to promote our creationist worldview?

created the heavens and earth out of nothing in six days, and humanity is the crowning achievement of the Creator. God's revelation also asserts concepts such as the sinfulness of humanity, redemption and

salvation through Jesus Christ, and spiritual and eternal life by divine grace through faith in Christ.

This God-centered and Bible-focused worldview does not require empirical evidence to substantiate the creation account. God is the only eyewitness and gives the trustworthy account sufficient for us. Our worldview places full trust in the omnipotent Creator and what he tells us about his creating, as well as redeeming and sanctifying, work.

Promoting our worldview

How might we best promote our worldview? Some seek to do this through so-called "creation science," an apologetic discipline that seeks to "defend" the creation account by showing the reasonableness of our convictions or the unreasonableness of the evolutionary worldview. Others see creation science as unnecessary or even counterproductive and seriously question whether the biblical record (also of Noah's flood) adequately explains observed geological and fossil phenomena. They point to the ample evidence that God created the universe with the appearance of age and are content to note that he could have created and buried fossils or arranged rock strata without laying them down successively over time.

Presenting our worldview will include the testimony that the creation account is trustworthy despite our limitations to comprehend how God did what he did. The certain proof is the clear Word of God. But the heart of our testimony will display sin and grace; our accountability to our Creator; and God's gracious remedy for our sin and death, namely, Christ's atoning sacrifice that brings life now and forever.



Contributing editor Forrest Bivens, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Colvary, Thiensville.

Read more about our biblical worldview and the Darwinian worldview in the next two features (pp. 10-13).

WE BELIEVE

GOD MADE US AS SPECIAL
CREATURES AND CREATED
A BEAUTIFUL, WONDERFUL
WORLD FOR US.

John A. Braun



On Sunday I stand with other believers and confess, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth." On Communion Sundays we join in saying, "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen." The words are slightly different, but we publicly admit that we believe God created the world in which we live and that he created each of us.

Of course, we all know that God did not form each one of us out of the dust, shape us, and breathe into our nostrils the breath of life. We had mothers and fathers, and we are mothers and fathers of our own children. But we still believe that God's power created all things. We confess as the psalmist confessed that our bodies are "wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14), that they are bodies that can reproduce according to the plan of the Creator.

IT'S RISKY TO SPEAK UP

In the safety of the worship service, we can make that confession without fear of opposition. No one will stand up and say, "You naïve simpletons. You evolved. Science proves it. God had nothing to do with it."

But more than once, such a sentiment has been expressed outside the church doors. In the public forum, we take a risk when we confess faith in the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. We risk the condescending and patronizing looks of those who believe that God did not create the world. They believe that all we see and know here is the result of natural and powerful forces, not the result of a wise Creator. We risk not only their quiet condescension but also their disdain and their active verbal abuse. We risk exclusion from serious discussion because we are branded as unintelligent, unscientific, backward, or worse.

Perhaps the greatest risk is that they will not listen when we speak of the God who redeemed us. They conclude that anyone who believes God created the world can't possibly have any reliable information about anything. That is the saddest part of the public forum. We desire to share the unparalleled beauty of Christ's love for wayward and disobedient sinners, but they will not listen—dismissing our witness with benign contempt. Then we are left with a prayer that

God the Holy Spirit—whom we also confess—will open a heart that has closed its own door.

IT'S DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN

Sometimes, I think, we do come across badly in conversations about God's great work of creation. We may offer nothing more than moral babble and uninformed and baseless arguments. Our explanations of the Creator's activities may be filled with logical and factual errors that bring a smile—or a vicious attack. In response, we may think that the louder we make our argument the better it is. We end up digging ourselves deeper into a hole we cannot escape.

We need to stop and pay attention to God's truth. We need to recover our perspective as creatures of our powerful and loving Creator. I think of Job. Job lost his family, wealth, and health. He had reasonable questions about why God permitted such pain and misery. In the midst of Job's many tragedies, God asked him, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it?" (Job 38:4,5).

It's a question for us too. How do we know what happened "in the beginning"? Who was there to witness God's activity? What description was left behind by some unknown historian? Of course, we know of only one—God himself. He did not leave us in doubt about how we got here or how our world came to exist. It's not just Genesis that tells the story, but all of Scripture asserts the creative power of God. Paul reminds us, "By him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . . all things were created by him and for him" (Colossians 1:16).

Such assertions do not satisfy every question. They do not explain so much of the created world and how it works. Often the more we explore, the more questions arise. When tested, others can conclude that natural forces offer just as plausible an explanation. The scientific method explores what we can see and perceive and offers hypotheses that do not depend on supernatural intervention. That

method has brought us much for which to be thankful—exploration of the natural physical laws of nature, medical advances, and technological advances to name a few.

How do we answer God's question to Job, "Where were you in the beginning? How did this all come to be?" One human answer is simply, "I don't know for sure. The evidence suggests a theory that seems to make logical sense. Further exploration will yield another hypothesis that will in turn yield yet another." Those who turn to God's explanation also answer the question. Their answer is different: "We weren't there either, but we trust the record left us by the Creator." And they risk opposition from the other camp.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO CONFESS OUR BELIEFS

But the alternative is to be silent. On occasions, I have to admit a desire to hide from the rough and tumble of debate with those who have no love for the Creator or the Redeemer. Yes, it is easier to hide behind a computer screen, close the doors, turn up the music, and disengage.

Some time ago I thought that most in the public forum would celebrate the birth of one of the lynchpins of our modern world—Charles Darwin. He was born on Feb. 12, 1809. I suspected that a great deal of attention would be given to the 200th anniversary of his birth.

I may be wrong, but I also thought it was important for us to look carefully at what God has revealed about the origin of our world. I don't want to celebrate Charles Darwin. Instead I want to say publicly what I say in the safety of my church: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth." I want to celebrate the beauty of God's wonderful world—majestic mountains, vast stretches of space dotted with the stars, colorful sunsets and sunrises, and even the wonder of a newborn.

I do not want to remain silent so that truth has no voice to challenge the pride of error. Months ago I asked Dr. Paul Boehlke, a biology professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, if he would help us find a voice to proclaim our faith in the Creator. He agreed to write four articles. The FIC staff is adding additional articles to complement his work.

Our goal is to assert that we are special creatures of a powerful God and that the world we inhabit is a wonderful, beautiful gift to us. Our efforts to confess our faith may be inadequate and flawed. But our approach is simple. We turn to the only reliable source of information and cling to it. Our God is beyond even the greatest of human minds. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). Let us trust him because he loved us enough to save us with his precious blood.

John Braun is executive editor of Forward in Christ.



A TROUBLI A TROUB

CHARLES DARWIN HAD DIFFICULTY MAKING SENSE OUT OF

Darwin Day" is planned as "a celebration of science and humanity." It will be held on and around Feb. 12, the birthday of Charles Darwin in 1809. The marking of the 200th anniversary of this particular scientist's birth is clearly a planned backlash against creationism. Years ago with some irony, Stephen Jay Gould, a leading evolutionist, pointed out that Darwin's status is practically that of a secular saint. Nevertheless, we should examine the life of Darwin for things that we might learn.

A SENSITIVE PERSON

Charles Darwin was a sensitive person. He attempted the medical course at Edinburgh University but had to tell his father that he did not have the fortitude for it. He did not care for cadaver dissections. However, the tipping point came with the observation of two gory surgeries. In those days there was no anesthesia. We likely would have joined him in his feelings as he viewed the suffering of the patients.

His father, a physician, feared for Charles' future. However, with approval, Charles then turned to the study of theology—not so much with thoughts of serving God but so that he might become a parson living as a respectable country gentleman. His strong interests in nature led him to establish friendships with the science professors. His theological education centered on "natural theology," which attempted to show the goodness of God in how nature was constructed in spite of the trouble that people experienced.

A TRIP AROUND THE WORLD

At graduation Darwin was offered the chance to be a companion to Captain FitzRoy on a five-year trip around the world. In 1831 he decided to take the trip on the *HMS Beagle* rather than accept an assignment to a parish.

When Darwin left, he apparently still had his faith.


FitzRoy gave him a copy of a volume by leading geologist Charles Lyell that held Earth to be very old. There was an official naturalist on board, but Darwin slowly took over the man's task, causing him to quit. Darwin gathered many specimens.

The story is usually told that he discovered "natural selection" when seeing the many different finches on the Galapagos Islands. But he did not actually put the theory together until after he returned. He could have published it by 1844, but something held him back. Perhaps he realized that he would be challenging the faith of many. He wrote to a close friend, J. D. Hooker, that stating that species are not immutable was like "confessing to a murder."

After the trip his health was never the same. He married his cousin Emma Wedgwood and with the connection to her family's successful pottery business assured himself of a comfortable income. He was free to continue to gather evidence that would support his idea that nature selects the individuals that are most fit. Evolution was already in the air in England, but Darwin had come up with a mechanism for it: natural selection. Just as farmers can artificially select cattle in order to breed better offspring, an environment naturally selects by allowing those that are better adapted to survive and to reproduce more offspring than those that are less fit.

GOD AT A DISTANCE

In 1858 two events occurred. First, a manuscript arrived from another naturalist, Russel Wallace, that described natural selection. It was too similar to what Charles planned to publish. Darwin's friends were called in, and they decided that both Darwin and Wallace's ideas should be jointly presented to the Linnean Society meeting. Darwin's claim to discovery was thus preserved.



NG WORLD; LED SOUL

A WORLD FILLED WITH SIN, DEATH, AND CRUELTY. Paul R. Boehlke

Second, Darwin's children became seriously ill, and his daughter Annie, age 10, died. This deeply affected Darwin. He could not understand why God would take this good child.

Darwin now put the Christian faith aside. He no longer attended church services. He walked his family to the church door and left them. He made no public comment about Annie's death, but in a letter to a friend just before writing *The Origin of Species*, he said, "What a book a Devil's Chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering low and horridly cruel works of nature!" Randal Keynes, a great-great-grandson of Darwin's, has held that certain passages in Darwin's writing now seem darker and point to the loss of Annie.

The more that Darwin studied, the less he could believe in a caring God. He examined the ichneumon, a group of wasps. The females find caterpillars, aphids, and spiders, and then inject their eggs either into or onto the host. When the eggs hatch, the larvae use the host as a live food supply. Stephen Jay Gould saw this harsh fact in nature as "a paramount challenge to God's benevolence" in Darwin's time. Darwin's theology did not emphasize the effects of sin.

In 1860 Darwin wrote to a devout Christian, Asa Gray at Harvard: "I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice."

Darwin turned toward favoring purely natural causes and pushed God away. Life had to be the result of cold, uncaring laws. Part and parcel of the age was Deism. While God may have created, after he finished, his

laws controlled how things worked. This thinking grew from Isaac Newton's discovery of the universal laws of gravity and motion. No longer did one imagine that angels kept the planets in motion; inertia did that. And Darwin could not imagine that God cared about the suffering in the world; it ran by cruel rules. For Darwin, if God existed at all, he was hidden and far away. To his mind, God was not needed to explain motion in the universe and so was not needed in explanations concerning life. Darwin declared himself to be an agnostic.


The closing line in *Origin* (below), according to Keynes, seems particularly poignant if one has Annie's death in mind. Darwin seemed to struggle to find some meaning in the coldness of an evolutionary history that God started, only to abandon.

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been and are being evolved.

The efforts of natural theology to explain everything did not serve Darwin well. The book of Job teaches us that there are things that we do not understand in this life, "things too wonderful" (42:3). Furthermore, the whole creation is suffering and waits for redemption. Even today, the agnostic and the atheist miss this point and reject God. The nature we see now is polluted by human sin. When Christ returns, it will be different. Then all tears will be wiped away.

Paul Boehlke, a member of Solem (East Side), Milwaukee, Wisconsin, teaches biology at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee.

This is the first article in a four-part series on creation and evolution.



Harley Berg, the owner of a used-car dealership, came home and told his wife, Gloria, "We have a new salesperson. John and his wife, Trisha, attend the Mormon church."

"As the owners, we try not to mix our religion with the job," says Gloria. "[John] was our employee, and we didn't want to make him uncomfortable." But they couldn't remain completely silent about the church—Messiah, Nampa, Idaho—where they have been members for four years.

"We love our church because it teaches the truth of Scripture. There's a love for people that makes us family, they have a ministry to Mormons, and they don't judge people," says Gloria. Though she and Harley didn't attend church for the first 12 years of their marriage, now that they've joined Messiah, she says, "You can't help but talk about our church."

So when Harley came home one day and said, "They are not going to the Mormon

church anymore," Gloria said, "Oh really . . ." and knew that the time was right to invite them. "The next time I saw John," says Gloria, "he started laughing and said, 'I know what you're going to do.'"

She invited them to visit Messiah and told John that the pastor and congregation reach out to those who have been members of the Latter Day Saints (LDS) church through Truth in Love Ministry (TILM).

The right time

That invitation came right as John and Trisha were wondering what to do about church. John had been raised Baptist, and he and 13-year-old Alissia had been baptized as Christians. However, at Trisha's request they started attending the LDS church and were baptized into that church three years ago.

Trisha had been raised LDS, but "my whole life I was off and on about the LDS church," she says. "I didn't know if it was true or not. I was never taught about the Bible or Jesus, just rules and laws that we had to follow to get to heaven. It didn't make sense."

Confessions of faith

Why are you a member of WELS? What does this church body have that makes it unique from hundreds of others? In this series, you will read about why some choose to join WELS and what members treasure most about being WELS.

Linda R. Buxa

They spent about three months of their marriage attending the LDS church. Then they simply stopped going to any church for a year and a half. "Life was confusing," says Trisha. "John and I both realized it wasn't the church we wanted to go to or have our kids raised in. The whole church was too sketchy. John knew that the whole time, but he only went to make me happy."

So over the past year they discussed if they wanted to go to church and, if they did, which one. Gloria's enthusiasm about Messiah led John and Trisha to accept the invitation. Gloria, however, doesn't take the credit for it. "All we did was invite them," she says. "It was God's timing."

The right place

As always, God's timing is perfect. But the timing and the invitation did not necessarily make it any easier to walk through the doors of an unfamiliar church. "At first we were nervous. It had been a long time since we even went to church, let alone a whole different religion," says Trisha.

The warmth of the church quickly helped them overcome any nervousness. "We loved it! Everyone there was so friendly and greeted us with warm smiles," Trisha says. They had planned on visiting Messiah once and then going to other churches to try them out. But after meeting the people and hearing the message, they didn't want to try any other churches.

They continued attending and took private Bible instruction classes with Mark Cares, pastor at Messiah. That led to Trisha and 19-month-old Kaylee being baptized. All this has changed the entire family's outlook. "We know now that we are eternally saved. We don't feel so guilty," says Trisha. "We know that we sin, but we also know that Jesus Christ died



The Harris family: John, Alissia, and Trisha holding Kaylee.

for our sins. In the LDS church there was no hope."

This eternal hope has led to some blessings on earth. "We are closer as a family. John and I have a better marriage, and we help teach our kids," says Trisha. "Alissia loves reading the Bible. She has stunned us all! She has become a better kid in general." And though Kaylee is too young to be aware of the recent changes, Trisha is confident "she will receive the blessings as she grows." And now she has forgiveness and the hope of eternal life with Jesus.

Joining Messiah has brought challenges as well. "John's side of the family are all Christian, but he has friends who are LDS," says Trisha. "My whole side is LDS, and I'm terrified to tell them because they will look down on me and be disappointed."

The other challenge comes from within. "It's hard for us to look at the teachings and the Bible with a Christian mind and not an LDS mind," she says. "When you are taught something that is false all your life, it's hard to understand the truth when it is taught to you."

Those challenges haven't stopped them, though. They have only been members for a few months and already have brought about a dozen people to

church. John's mom attends every Sunday and Trisha's sister, Amy, and her son, Colby, were baptized in her November 2008.

Cares also sees Trisha becoming active in the church's outreach ministry and witnessing to members of the LDS church because her family members are local, prominent Mormons. Trisha agrees, but first she wants to learn more and become more confident about the Bible's teachings. Still, she already knows the basics. "I have found Jesus, and I'm so thankful for that!" she says.

As for the Bergs, the ones who initially invited John and Trisha, well, they had to close their car dealership because of the economy. John was their employee for only five months. Says Gloria, "We look back over the past year, and it was so hard to lose our business. The one good thing that happened was John and Trisha. God used our business and let it stay open long enough for them to join the church."

And all it took was an invitation.

Linda Buxa is a member of St. Mark's, Citrus Heights, California.

To help reach out to your Mormon friends and family or for more information on Truth in Love Ministry, go to www.truthinloveministry.net

Do you have a story to share about how you became a WELS member? Send it to Forward in Christ, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net.

The LUTHER

As we enter our place of worship, the experience from beginning to

“Where do they all come from?” I wonder as I observe our congregation’s parking lot. People in varied styles of dress from all walks and stages in life come to worship at the Lord’s place of worship. No one forces them to come. God’s grace has sought them out. There they are, invited and compelled by love from God through Christ. I imagine each soul wishing to be forgiven, nourished, and refreshed for life. I believe they have hearts wanting to be engaged and challenged to greater things. Here they come to connect with their Savior and with their brothers and sisters in Christ. Probably each has personal expectations for worship, but they come anticipating that God will communicate with them.

We move toward worship

I watch them walk from the parking lot. I hope someone will be at the door to greet them. The welcome area is a place for gracious greetings, where the hospitality of Christianity at its finest is often on display. That entry space is a connecting place for friends, guests, and strangers. In that place we need to look around, see who is left alone, and connect with those in need of concern or encouragement. I look for guests who require help in finding where to go for worship, Bible study, or Sunday school. The buzz before weekly worship is about many things. Young people smile at seeing their friends. Christian fellowship is alive and well from the parking lot into the welcome area.

The time comes to enter the place of sacred worship. Some sit in prayer and contemplation. Others listen to the preservice music. Still others read a psalm or another Scripture verse. A few think of a loved one who recently died.

A mother and father pace with excitement as they await their child’s baptism. A few read the service folder and check on the time for meetings or activities. Perhaps there’s a note explaining the reason for the flowers—in memory of someone or as a celebration of some event. As worship time comes closer, mothers try to hush their children.

Then the pastor greets and welcomes those who have come. People transfer thoughts from their busy week to this focused time for God. They implore the Spirit’s presence and sing of the wonderful works of God. We all come before God as beggars at the throne of grace, confessing known and unknown sins, pleading for mercy. We find reason to rejoice when we hear the pastor’s proclamation of God’s forgiveness in Christ and respond with an assenting amen, the Gloria, or another hymn of praise. How uplifting to receive God’s forgiveness together in worship!

God touches us in worship, and we speak to him

God speaks to each of us in the lessons, in the Gospel reading, and in the sermon. This is why we all come. God’s Word bears upon our hearts. The ancient and timeless message of the gospel of the Lord is God’s power, forgiving and transforming lives and putting them on a new foundation in Jesus Christ. Together we exclaim, “Praise be to you, O Christ!” Connected with Christians ever since the Council of Nicea more than 1,600 years ago, we confess, “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” How meaningful is worship!

But there is more. On this Communion Sunday, God unites us to himself in the Sacrament, forgiving, sustaining, and strengthening us for our Christian calling and lives of service for him and for the dignity of other human beings. In fellowship with one another and with our Savior, we partake of this heavenly food.

Who would want to miss this gift of fullness of life in Christ, this foretaste of heavenly bliss? If we cut ourselves off from fellowship

AN WAY of worship

end offers many blessings.

Wayne I. Schulz

with God, we also cut ourselves off from the encouragement of God's people. Worship has individual and group aspects to it. Here we are not alone. Together we meet as God's people and take note of those who join us to sing, pray, hear, and receive God's blessings.

In worship we pray for the nations—the people and their leaders—that there may be peace and free course for gospel proclamation. We pray for troubled and hurting souls everywhere. We give thanks for all blessings received from our God. Togetherness in worship produces expanded opportunities for the prayer life of individuals.

Our worship is encouragement

In worship God connects with us, and we connect with him and one another. Compelled by his love in Christ we “consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24). We gather to “encourage one another” (Hebrews 10:25). Personal encouragement is what God gives in worship. Encouragement is what we extend in our conversations after worship, in the work of our congregation's task forces, and in all our efforts to proclaim Jesus to more people. Encouragement is recognizing people's gifts and urging their use. Encouragement is the look and hug of concern for others with health or relational difficulties. Encouragement is talking to the young children and teen members of the congregation. Encouragement results in acts of togetherness in the Lord.

Recently my pastor spoke on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. In this selection, after commenting clearly on the resurrection of Christians on the Last Day, Paul wrote, “And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.” My pastor gave worshipers ten seconds to look around and say to as many people as possible, “You will be with the Lord forever.”

The entire nave was abuzz with those words spoken with conviction and joy.

We go out with his blessings

As worship ends, we thank God for coming to us in Word and sacraments. In song we encourage one another to “tell ev'ry-one what he has done” (*Christian Worship*, p. 36). Such is our privilege and God's expectation of us. This is something we need to hear and do.

At the end of our worship, we listen in silence as the pastor pronounces God's blessing. This is aimed at us. Where else in a fractured and wayward world of disconnected people can we go to receive something like this, a blessing from God on high? Our lives are not just dull, weekly routines. God has called us to this area of the world and to see it in a new light. The week ahead may not be easy. But in worship God has grounded us on the foundation of Jesus. Now he scatters us into the world of people he loves. We go with his blessing, his favor, his strength, his peace. Armed with peace and the potent gospel, we are Christ's light and salt, ready to face the world as his enlightened, salt-bearing, and adventurous people. Together with others we need to hear that in worship.

Wayne Schulz, a mission counselor, is a member at Eastside, Madison, Wisconsin.

This is the last article in a nine-part series on Lutheran worship.

WHATEVER

Struggles for strength

God gave me the tools and the people to build my strength.
But he gave me strength inside too.

Ashley Loberg

I didn't realize how hard growing up could really be. My life was carefree. Nothing could bring me down. Well, I was wrong. A disease suddenly became a part of my life forever. Never in a million years did I think I would be diagnosed with such a serious disease at such a young age. But I was.

At seven years old, I developed symptoms of diabetes. My mom, a nurse, wanted me to get tested. Going to the hospital, getting my blood drawn, and not knowing what any of it was for—all of it scared me. A few days later I got the test results, and sure enough, I had it.

Oftentimes I asked God, "Why me? What did I ever do to deserve it? Are you punishing me?"

I got frustrated many times since I couldn't just grab a handful of M&M's® like the rest of the kids. I had to count carbohydrates and take insulin. It wasn't fair!

Not only did I have to constantly count carbohydrates, but I also had to deal with people—mean people—as I got older.

I was in tears often. I felt weird enough having this disease, but when other kids made fun of me and made me feel bad about having diabetes, it hurt.

Juvenile diabetes is not curable; doctors don't know what causes it. People have thought that the reason I am diabetic is because I ate too many sweets as a child. They said I could have prevented myself from getting the disease by cutting back—that it was my fault.

Many of these things hurt me a lot, and the sad part is I blamed God. I couldn't understand why I had been chosen to have diabetes.

I have always loved to smile. However, I didn't smile for almost a year, and that's hard on a high

school student. For the longest time I blamed God and did not know how much I needed him. So often I forgot Jesus made me his child.

Yes, I got through those first couple of years with my family and friends helping me, but I didn't realize I needed someone else—my Lord and Savior.

A relationship with God during the difficult times in our lives is important. Romans 8:28 tells us, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

I have met many people because of my diabetes. People have seen how responsible and strong the diabetes has made me. Others have asked about it. Without diabetes, I would never have met some wonderful friends. Ironically, diabetes has been one of the best additions to my life.

God gave me the tools and the people to build my strength. But he gave me strength inside too. My diabetes helped turn me toward a Savior who loves me. Through tears and sadness came heartfelt prayers. He reminded me that he is always there.

Now more than ever, my friendship with Jesus is stronger, and people can see my happiness. I am a firm believer that God gives us only what we can handle and gives us the tools to get through the challenges. He equips us to be his representatives so we can help others through their tough times. The Lord has now equipped me, and I have this awful blessing to remind me of this every day.

Ashley Loberg, a junior at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, is a member at Good Shepherd, West Allis, Wisconsin.



Obituaries

Orlin E. Wraalstad 1931-2008

Orlin Wraalstad was born July 26, 1931. He died Oct. 24, 2008.

He first taught at Doctor Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Later he served English, Viroqua, Wis.; Zambia Mission, Lusaka, Zambia, Africa; St. Peter, Globe, Ariz.; Gethsemane, Cibecue, Ariz.; and congregations in California.

Harold E. Wicke 1912-2008

Harold Wicke was born July 12, 1912, in Kirchhaeyn, Town of Jackson, Wis. He died Nov. 1, 2008, in Sun Prairie, Wis.

A 1937 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.; St. Peter, Weyauwega, Wis.; St. Mark, Watertown, Wis.; Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Eastside, Madison, Wis. He served as the first full-time editor of *The Northwestern Lutheran* from 1974-1982.

He is preceded in death by two brothers and two sisters. He is survived by his wife, Thekla; one son; one daughter; two grandsons; and two granddaughters.

Karen Kay Straseske 1940-2008

Karen Straseske (nee Krueger) was born Feb. 17, 1940, in Columbus, Wis. She died Nov. 20, 2008, in Madison, Wis.

She taught at St. John, Newville (rural Waterloo), Wis.; Zion, Columbus, Wis.; and St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Jerry; three sons; one daughter; four grandchildren; and two sisters.

Gary Allen Brown 1949-2008

Gary Brown was born Sept. 27, 1949, in Mondovi, Wis. He died Nov. 24, 2008, in Menomonie, Wis.

A 1977 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at St. Katherine, Beyer Settlement, Wis., and St. John, Popple Creek, Wis.

He is preceded in death by his father. He is survived by his wife, Kathie; his mother; and one brother.

Through my Bible
IN 3 YEARS
03/2009

1. Hebrews 10:1-18	17. Num. 14:10b-45
2. Heb. 10:19-39	18. Num. 15
3. Heb. 11:1-22	19. Num. 16:1-35
4. Heb. 11:23-40	20. Num. 16:36-18:7
5. Heb. 12:1-17	21. Num. 18:8-19:22
6. Heb. 12:18-29	22. Num. 20
7. Heb. 13:1-8	23. Num. 21
8. Heb. 13:9-25	24. Num. 22
9. Numbers 1, 2	25. Num. 23, 24
10. Num. 3, 4	26. Num. 25, 26
11. Num. 5:1-6:21	27. Num. 27, 36
12. Num. 6:22-7:89	28. Num. 28, 29
13. Num. 8:1-9:14	29. Num. 30
14. Num. 9:15-10:36	30. Num. 31
15. Num. 11, 12	31. Num. 32
16. Num. 13:1-14:10a	

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New course offers spiritual and practical help with personal finances

As a financial advisor and member of St. Paul, East Troy, Wis., Jim Schwartz realizes that many people are typically financially stressed. "But in today's economy," he says, "many more are desperate." Schwartz long felt that a solid, Christian financial program was lacking in his profession.

As a pastor in Farmington, N.M., Jim Fleming's congregation is socially and ethnically diverse (Hispanic, Anglo, and Native American). "After living here and learning about the different cultures," Fleming reflects, "I soon realized that there is another culture that has a tremendous influence on our people—the culture of American materialism." Fleming's search for a financial Bible study that he could use to guide and counsel families ended in frustration.

Enter Heart in Focus—a new course from WELS Adult Discipleship that trains individuals in wise, faith-focused finances. The course has come as an answered prayer for Fleming, Schwartz, and many others.

Along with stewardship workshops for congregational leaders and financial seminars for called workers, Heart in Focus is another resource under the umbrella called Faith Focused Finances. It is suggested as a regular course that can be offered by a congregation to members and the community.

The motto for Heart in Focus is "Viewing money matters through spiritual eyes." Co-author Pastor David Kehl says, "Personal finance is one of the real challenges that affect spiritual life, family life, and concern for others—often producing a fear that diverts Christians from the peace and contentment found in Christ." Each of the course's six sessions offers both Christ-focused and practical approaches to finances.

First, "time is spent understanding the pull of our hearts in the direction of the treasures of this world and the



Rev. Jon and Amanda Bergemann (front) and Rev. Fred and Jenna Guldberg learn together at a personal financial seminar for called workers in Clifton Park, N.Y., using Heart in Focus as the workbook.

consumerism that feeds our perceptions of needs and wants," Kehl explains.

Next, practical steps are outlined for giving, saving, and investing; eliminating debt; and making wise daily choices. Final sessions help participants shift their priorities to reflect who they are and what they see as God's calling for their lives.

"Now with the stock market decline, the suffering housing market, and the banking crisis, we are seeing an even greater need for people to realize what is most important in life, to gain trust in who their God is, and to follow practical steps to wisely live with the situations they are facing," Kehl reflects.

Through Heart in Focus, God is already leading many people in the right direction. In New Mexico, Fleming has watched attendees that had been burdened with the shame of poorly managing God's money and possessions leave with the reminder that God has forgiven their sin of mismanagement. Knowing that financial stress is in the top five causes of

divorce, Schwartz says he is thankful to see couples taking this chance to work out their financial direction together.

Kehl says he has heard thrilling stories of couples finally getting out of debt; others are appreciative for the new direction

and purpose they have for the plenty with which God has blessed them. "Our financial lives are oftentimes one of the bigger obstacles to our spiritual growth and our Christian living," says Kehl. "The bottom line is we want to help individuals grow in their faith—and I'm confident that is going to have a positive impact on what we do as a synod."

For more information about Heart in Focus and Faith Focused Finances, visit www.wels.net/jump/faithfinance or call 414-256-3278.



New bookstore helps get the Word out

Like many mission-minded congregations in WELS, members of Trinity, Bay City, Mich., were looking for new ways to reach out to the community around them. However, they faced an interesting challenge. According to Richard Starr, pastor at Trinity, the congregation is located in the midst of the largest Lutheran population per capita in the United States. The solution? Amazing Grace, the congregation's new Christian bookstore.

"It gives us an opportunity to nurture our own members and reach out to others," says Starr. "It's also a way to get biblically-sound materials into the hands of more people."

Since it opened last October, the bookstore has been doing just that. With a coffee bar and a variety of Northwestern Publishing House literature and music available, Starr says the store stays busy. He estimates that well over 1,000 people have visited—many of whom are not WELS.

"A Baptist minister came in, and he had been

searching and searching for a good commentary on the book of Psalms," says Starr. "He bought John Brug's commentary on Psalms, and he was just delighted with it, just thrilled. He sat down, read it, and said, 'This is just what I've been looking for; this is what I need! I'm going to tell my people about your store.'"

Other customers are looking for help with life issues. "One woman came in—she had two little ones with her," Starr remembers. "When one of

the volunteers asked if they could help her, she shared her story. She said, 'I want to raise my children to know their Savior, but my husband doesn't want anything to do with God or the church. It's just a battle in my home whenever I bring up Christ.' " Starr says the woman eventually left with the book *Spiritually Single*. Two days later she came back and shared that the book had given her the direction and support she needed for her family's situation.

"It's these kinds of stories that let us know the store is accomplishing its purpose—and that is to get the Word out," says Starr.

He says he hopes that in the future the store will generate enough funds for Trinity to start other ministries. "We want to continue to do outreach," he says. "If the bookstore allows us to do that while supporting [another ministry] like a pregnancy counseling center, that's what we'll be looking to do."

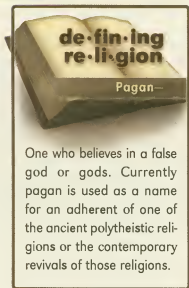


With encouragement and generous support from Northwestern Publishing House, Trinity, Bay City, Mich., opened a Christian bookstore last October.

WELS news briefs

Ministry of Christian Giving / 800-827-5482; mcg@sab.wels.net

Pastor Steven Staude from Christ, West Salem, Wis., and Mr. Carl Leibner from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans have accepted calls to be giving counselors for WELS Ministry of Christian Giving. These men will take on the duties left by one full-time vacancy and four giving counselors who have semi-retired since last summer. The calls are part of a new program developed by Christian Giving. For every two counselors that go into semi-retirement, the Conference of Presidents has approved one full-time counselor to be called. Pastor Dave Liggett, director, says this allows Christian Giving to continue the same level of service to congregations without increases to the budget. He says another advantage of the semi-retirement program is getting to keep well-trained and skilled people on staff. Learn more about this ministry at www.wels.net/jump/christiangiving.



One who believes in a false god or gods. Currently pagan is used as a name for an adherent of one of the ancient polytheistic religions or the contemporary revivals of those religions.

Q&A with Warren Krug, LSI president

This month is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin, author of The Origin of Species. As people prepared for "Darwin Day" celebrations, Forward in Christ sat down with Warren Krug, acting president of the Lutheran Science Institute (LSI), to talk about the organization and how it aims to educate the synod about evolution and other science-related topics.

Question – Tell me about the Lutheran Science Institute.

Answer – Well, our mission is to enlighten the members of WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod about science-related and health-related topics that are of interest to Christians. We have had some contact from those who are not Lutherans, but our main purpose is to be a service organization to our synod. We do have a library of books and audiovisuals that we make available to our schools for events like parent/teacher meetings and to our congregations.

Question – How did the institute originally get farmed?

Answer – We began in 1973. I believe the creation/evolution controversy was the main reason for it beginning. A group of teachers got together and decided to organize the institute.

Today, we have approximately 60 members, so it's not a large group. I would say the majority of our members are just interested laypeople. We do have a number of pastors and teachers. We have only one Ph.D. right now—our executive director.

Question – Do any members of the institute give presentations?

Answer – We have given presentations to vacation Bible schools and parent/teacher organizations. We are trying to improve our service in that respect, but right now we do offer our services to any groups in [southeastern Wisconsin]. We speak on creation issues, the flood—that type of thing.

Question – So what is your background? Have you always been interested in creation/evolution?

Answer – My interest in evolution happened as a result of my college education. I went to a Lutheran university not of our synod. I took a biology course, and the professor was not bashful about promoting the theory of evolution as fact. I was being influenced by this professor and began thinking, "Maybe there is something to this evolution business." But by the grace of God I came across some creationist literature. Through my study of this literature and the Bible and by the grace of God, I was able to see the light and was brought back on track. Otherwise, who knows? I could have easily lost my faith because of it.

Question – How did you get involved with the LSI?

Answer – Well, I'm a retired Lutheran school teacher, and [one of the LSI members] came and spoke to our parent/teacher group. That's how I got interested in the group, and soon after I joined. When they said they needed an editor, I offered my services. So that's how I fell into that role of editor of the *LSI Journal*. It's a bimonthly publication, so it's a fair amount of work. But I enjoy it. I've been the editor since 1987.

Question – Let's talk about the journal—what kinds of articles are usually featured?

Answer – I would say other than creation/evolution, which is one of the main topics, we are talking about ethical issues and health issues. We have published the *LSI Journal* since 1987. We are a low-budget organization, so we do all of our publication in-house. But we would like to grow to the point of maybe having a professionally published magazine.

Question – What are some of the organization's other goals?

Answer – An ultimate goal of mine would be to produce a Lutheran creationist textbook series for elementary schools. Right now the schools basically have a choice of an evolution-based secular series or some creation series that bring in doctrinal issues like decision theology. So I think there is a need for a Lutheran-based science series.

Question – Do you think schools and congregations will be focusing more on the topics of creation and evolution this year because of the 200th anniversary of Darwin?

Answer – I hope and pray that they will. Evolution paints the picture of mankind evolving slowly from the animal kingdom and getting better on its own by natural means. The book of Genesis, on the other hand, paints the picture of mankind being created at a high level and then falling into an abyss of sin and needing a Savior to pull us back up. And I think that it's important to get that word out.

More information about the Lutheran Science Institute and articles from the LSI Journal are available online at www.lutheranscience.org.



Warren Krug

New congregation continues to grow, gears up for worship

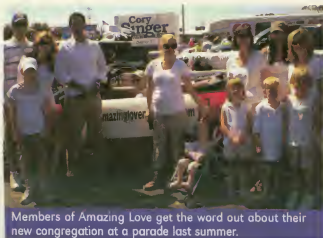
Worship services will start this month for Amazing Love in New Lenox, Ill.—one of WELS' newest home mission congregations. Pastor Dustin Blumer says this is an exciting milestone for this young congregation of about 30 souls.

"When we tell people about our church and they are interested, the first thing they want to do is worship with us—and now they'll be able to," says Blumer. "So we're gearing up for our first worship service and making sure everything is in place."

In the meantime, Blumer says, they are going to keep reaching out and making connections.

Getting the Word out has been Blumer's primary responsibility since he arrived last summer. In addition to sharing the message of Christ's love and telling people about the new mission, he's trying to learn more about the needs of the community through regular canvassing—which Blumer says can be an interesting experience.

"I had to talk to the police twice because they were called on us," he says. "We started canvassing pretty early [in the process]. People got suspicious when they asked us where we



Members of Amazing Love get the word out about their new congregation at a parade last summer.

were from and we said, 'We're from a new church, but we don't have a name or a location yet.' " Blumer says he and a fellow canvasser were even threatened as they went door to door. "It shakes you up a little bit," he says, "but it's worth it."

Why? "Because of the opportunities I have to share the gospel," he says. "For instance, if I have been talking with someone for five minutes and they ask me where our church is or what our services are like, then it isn't unnatural to say, 'If you have a minute or two, I can share with you what we're all about.' " Then Blumer shares a simple law/gospel presentation called The Bridge, which emphasizes the free gift

of forgiveness and love that is ours through Jesus.

So far, members have canvassed more than 5,000 homes in the area and participated in community events like last summer's Frankfort Festival Days Parade where they handed out more than 900 business cards. And the community is starting to take notice—more than 150 people have already expressed interest in the new church.

Blumer says that after worship starts, the congregation plans to continue its weekly Bible studies, Bible information class, and confirmation class—and hopefully add more programs and events as the congregation expands. He also says the group has started thinking about purchasing land to make a permanent church home.

"Our goal is to always keep that outreach mentality," he says. "We are here to reach those who don't know their Savior, so we're going to do whatever we can. We always want to be looking out instead of in and asking, 'What can we do to reach out with the gospel of Jesus?'"

Visit www.amazinglove.org for more information.

In the news

The Dec. 2, 2008, issue of *The Saginaw News* ran a story on St. John Lutheran School, Saginaw, Mich., which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

Allison Gorkowsky, freshman at Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis., was featured in the Nov. 7, 2008, issue of the *Courier-Life* after winning top honors for an instrumental piano piece she wrote, recorded, and submitted to the annual Wisconsin State Music Association competition.

Students at Trinity, Brillion, Wis., were featured in the Nov. 5, 2008, issue of *The Post-Crescent* after holding a mock presidential election and inviting 87 other WELS schools across the country to participate. Daryl Johnson, the teacher at Trinity who came up with the idea, set up a Web site to tally the results: 3,271 votes for Republican candidate John McCain and 1,157 for Democratic candidate Barack Obama.

For the past six months, William Cornelius, pastor at Shepherd of the Mesa, Battlement Mesa, Colo.—a new mission congregation of about 20 souls—has been getting out into the community to meet new people and share the news of Jesus. The Nov. 2, 2008, issue of *The Citizen Telegram* highlighted Cornelius' most recent outreach activity: a city basketball league for elementary school boys in Battlement Mesa.

The CW, a local TV station in Madison, Wis., ran a story on Lakeside Lutheran High School in Lake Mills last fall. Both the principal and students were interviewed about the school. When asked what sets Lakeside Lutheran apart, student Chris Lanham said, "It's Christian education by far. You don't find this in too many high schools in the area. That's why I came here—to learn about Jesus Christ." Another student, Jessica Schubkegel, said of her school, "It's a good Christian environment. I know everyone believes the same thing."

ELS and WELS work together to reach out to South Koreans

About 60 Korean teenagers are receiving a Christian education in WELS' area Lutheran high schools and preparatory schools through a program of the East Seoul Canaan Church, a mission congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) in Seoul, South Korea. The program, which prepares students for attending Lutheran high schools in the United States, is also providing opportunities for outreach.

"It's a win-win situation . . .," says Pastor Steven Petersen, ELS missions counselor. "Our mission is blessed, the kids get a good education, their parents become members of our church, and the [WELS] high schools that sometimes have empty seats and are in need of tuition support get the student population and the tuition that comes from that."

The program began in 2005 as a Foreign Language school to offer English language training to native Koreans. "Many of the original students were members of the congregation," says Dennis Morrison, a teacher at the institute since 2006. "But Rev. Kim [the pastor at East Seoul Canaan Church] has used the school as an evangelism arm for the greater Seoul area." Now the East Seoul Canaan Language Institute—the official name of the school—especially works to prepare teenagers to attend Lutheran high schools in the United States.

The institute is a draw because Korean parents want to have their children attend school in the United States. According to Morrison, parents believe that the education in the states will be better than that in Korea. Private education in the United States is also more reasonably priced.

When parents ask Kim about having their children attend the institute, Kim requests that parents take a Bible information class while their children attend classes. "Pastor Kim tells me that these people start the classes very grudgingly . . . but about halfway through, the light goes on and they begin to understand what grace is all about," says Petersen.

In the institute, students receive training in secular subjects like English and American history but also learn the

Word through Christian doctrine and catechism classes.

In August 2008, 12 students and 12 adults were baptized, and 22 students were confirmed. "A large portion of the congregation are members here because they were introduced to Christianity by sending their students to the institute," says Morrison. East Seoul Canaan Church now has 250 members.

After their work at the institute, the students are placed at one of seven WELS area Lutheran high schools and the two preparatory high schools. Great Plains Lutheran High School in Watertown, S.D., accepted its first Korean student in spring 2006. "We were looking to expand and find other ways to share the gospel," says Principal Bert Falak. Great Plains added an English as Second Language teacher to its staff in order to offer special English courses to the Korean freshmen and sophomore. By their junior and senior years, the Koreans are entirely integrated into all the classes.

Although cultural differences do offer some challenges, Falak says it is a blessing to "see how people from two different worlds can come together and become friends." He also says that it gives the American students an opportunity to help relatively new Christians grow in their faith.

This year, nine Korean students are attending Great Plains, and three will become the first Korean graduates of the school.

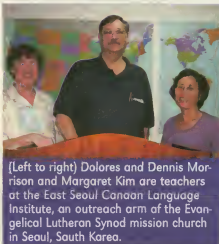
Seulgi Hur, or "George," one of the seniors, found out about the language institute in Korea because he lived in its neighborhood. "I was not Christian," he says, but he heard about Christ at

the institute and was baptized and confirmed after taking classes. Now he says he is praying every day. Although the language and the cold South Dakota winters are challenging for him, he appreciates the friendships he has made, the greatest of which is his relationship with his Savior.

"God-willing, the East Seoul Canaan Language Institute, as well as the church, will be a means by which many will come to the knowledge of the truth and learn about their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ," says Morrison.



Twenty-two students were confirmed in August 2008 at East Seoul Canaan Church. Twelve adults and twelve students were also baptized.



(Left to right) Dolores and Dennis Morrison and Margaret Kim are teachers at the East Seoul Canaan Language Institute, an outreach arm of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod mission church in Seoul, South Korea.

Martin Luther College graduates

On Dec. 18, 2008, 11 students graduated from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.



Jordan J. Dannecker ★
Milwaukee, Wis.



Jeremiah D. Drews ★
Adrian, Mich.



Anna J. Kieckhafer ★
Hartford, Wis.



Ryan A. Kummerow ■
Markesan, Wis.



David L. Neumann ★
New Ulm, Minn.



Amanda M. Rahde ★
Caleman, Wis.



Nicalee A. Raper ▲
Red Wing, Minn.



Seth A. Scheuerlein ◆
Thiensville, Wis.



Emily R. Timmermann ●
Janesville, Wis.



Laurel E. Utech ●
Green Lake, Wis.



Anna M. Zarling ★
New Ulm, Minn.

Find out
where recent
graduates
were assigned
on p. 26.

◆ Bachelor of Arts

★ Bachelor of Science in Education—Elementary Education

● Bachelor of Science in Education—Elementary and Secondary Education

▲ Bachelor of Science in Education—Elementary and Early Childhood Education

■ Bachelor of Science—Staff Ministry

District news

South Atlantic

Risen Savior, Bradenton, Fla., broke ground for its first facility on Nov. 9, 2008. The congregation borrowed an antique plowshare, and everyone pulled together to help create a furrow in the ground.

Members of Trinity, St. Lucia, West Indies, celebrated the Reformation last November with a musical worship service. "This year, we had the steel pan, guitar, bongo drums, and a homemade shaker playing 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God' at full volume," says Pastor Tom Spiegelberg. After the service, the group had a Luther quiz, food, and fellowship.

Michigan

Last November, congregations from the Northern, Southeastern, and Southwestern Conferences of the Michigan District gathered non-perishable food items, paper products, and cleaning supplies and delivered them to families of married students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. In addition, congregation members donated more than



St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio, celebrated the baptisms of nine children on Oct. 19, 2008. "The school is a great mission arm of the church and has led many children throughout the decades to know and believe in Christ through Christian education and the Sacrament of Holy Baptism," says Pastor Kevin Cartez.

\$5,400 to the married students' food bank.

Dakota-Montana

Shepherd of the Hills, Custer, S.D., rededicated its facilities on Nov. 9, 2008, after completing an extensive remodeling project. Members did almost all of the work on the interior and exterior of the church. "It was a time for thanksgiving to a gracious God who blessed this church family with the energy, spirit, and resources to do this work of love," says Pastor Lloyd Lemke.

Michigan

Happy anniversary!

SEW—Don Roebert, organist at Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis., celebrated 30 years of musical service on Oct. 5, 2008.

SC—Abiding Savior, Weslaco, Texas, is celebrating its 35th anniversary on Feb. 22.

The district reporters for this month are: D-M—Wayne Rouse; MI—John Eich; SA—Christopher Kruschel; SC—William Gobb; SEW—Scott Oelhofen.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bitter, Robert A., to Redeemer, Fand du Lac, Wis.

Hahn, Steven A., to Cross of Glory, Botan Rouge, La.

Henkel, Carl R., to Hope, Belvidere, Ill.

Luchterhand, Lyle L., to Retirement

Martin, LeRay A., to retirement

Martin, Peter L., to Missionary of Education and Publication, Malawi, Africa

Michel, Robert H., to Calvary, Milwaukee, Wis.

Stuebs, Ralph O., to retirement

Ziebell, William W., to retirement

Teachers

Brandel, Jodi L., to Salem, Greenfield, Minn.

Dusseau, Robert R., to Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.

Kasten, Brian K., to St. Paul, Cudahy, Wis.

Schedler, Jamie, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.

Sebold, John A., to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.

Walz, Justin C., to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.

ASSIGNMENTS OF GRADUATES

Teachers

Drews, Jeremiah D., to St. Mark, Lincoln, Neb.

Scrifer, Phillip P., to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis.

Timmermann, Emily R., to Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.

Uhlenbrauck, Corinne M., to Bethel, Sioux Falls, S.D.

CALL FOR COMMENTS

Martin Luther College invites comments from the public in preparation for its regular evaluation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Comments should address substantive matters related to the quality of the institution and its academic programs. Comments must be in writing and signed. Comments cannot be treated as confidential. Please send your comments by Feb. 28, 2009, to Public Comment on Martin Luther College, The Higher Learning Commission, 30 N LaSalle St, Ste 2400, Chicago IL 60602.

ANNIVERSARIES

Brooklyn Park, Minn.—Brooklyn (30). Feb. 15. Warship, 10 A.M.; dinner to follow. Jan Budach, 763-560-5953.

Weslaca, Texas—Abiding Savior (35). Feb. 22. Warship, 8 & 10:30 A.M.; dinner to follow. RSVP requested by Jan. 25. Joel Sauer, 956-968-5228.

Raymond, S.D.—Bethlehem (125). June

21. Warship, 10:45 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 605-532-3766; pheasant @itctel.com

COMING EVENTS

Mission and Ministry—Feb. 3-5. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Theme: "Go and make disciples: at home, abroad, for life." Kevin Schnake, schnakek @wls.wels.net.

Martin Luther College Chair tour scheduled—507-354-8221.

Feb. 27-7 P.M., Zion, Greenleaf, Wis.

Feb. 28-7 P.M., Trinity, Marinette, Wis.

Mar. 1-7 P.M., Immanuel, Sault Sainte Marie, Mich.

Mar. 2-7 P.M., Emanuel, Tawas City, Mich.

Mar. 3-10 A.M., Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; 7 P.M., Grace, Flint, Mich.

Mar. 4-7 P.M., Divine Grace, Lake Orion, Mich.

Mar. 5-11 A.M., Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich.; 7 P.M., St. Paul, Livonia, Mich.

Mar. 6-1:30 P.M., Michigan Lutheran High School, St. Joseph, Mich.; 7 P.M., St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich.

Mar. 7-7 P.M., St. Paul, East Troy, Wis.

Mar. 8-8 & 10:30 A.M., Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.

Mar. 22-3 P.M., St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.

Apr. 17-7 P.M., St. Matthew, Winona, Minn.

Apr. 18-7 P.M., First, La Crosse, Wis.

Apr. 19-8 & 10:15 A.M., First, La Crosse, Wis.

Evangelism workshop—Mar. 7, 9 A.M.-3 P.M., Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Theme: "Be prepared to answer." Speaker: Prof. Mark Paustian, 414-771-2530; church.secretary@fairviewlutheran.com. Web site, www.ShareGrace.net.

Today's Christian Women Retreat—Mar. 13-15. Sheraton Lansing Hotel, Lansing, Mich. Theme: "Lord, you have the words of eternal life." Web site, www.tcw.org.

Pathways to Christ Retreat—Mar. 20-22. LaSures Hall, Oshkosh, Wis. 920-233-1069. Web site, www.martinlutherashkash.com.

WELS Church Librarians Organization meeting—Mar. 21, 8:15 A.M., St. John, Lannan, Wis. Marilyn Lemke, 262-251-4145; m-lemke@wi.rr.com.

Christian Woman Daily Retreat—Mar. 27-29. Olympia Spa & Resort, Ocanamawac, Wis. Theme: "Love each other as I have loved you." Maureen Sertich, 262-784-0412.

2009 WELS Regional Handbell Festivals—

Apr. 18-19. Concert, 2 P.M., Apr. 19. Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fand du Lac, Wis.

Apr. 18-19. Concert, 2 P.M., Apr. 19. St. Craix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, Minn.

Apr. 25-26. Concert, 2 P.M., Apr. 26. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Web site, www.welsbells.com.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Awareness

Retreat—Apr. 24-26. Byron Center, Brownsville, Wis. Sponsored by Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service. Elsa Manthey, 920-731-9798; emanthey@wlcfs.org.

China study trip—May 17-June 2. Hasts,

Worthen Lutheran College, New Ulm, Minn., and Wisconsin Lutheran College,

Milwaukee, Wis. Tour sites include Shanghai, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Beijing,

Xi'an, Guilin, and Hang Kong. Earl Heidtke, 507-354-8224, ext. 244; Glen Thompson, 414-443-8945. Web site,

www.wlc.edu/academics/his/.

National Campus Ministry Retreat—May

18-21. Metropolis Hotel, Action City, and

Florian Gardens, Eau Claire, Wis. Hosted by UW-Eau Claire. Theme: "Walk THIS Way."

Web site, www.campusministryrally.com.

46th annual LWMS convention—June

25-28. Sheraton Denver Hotel, Denver,

Calo. Hosts, Rocky Mountain Circuit. Theme: "Mission with an Altitude." Web

site, www.lwms.org.

2009 WELS International Youth Rally—

July 8-11. Iowa State University, Ames,

Iowa. Theme: "Follow the path; lead the way." Web site, www.welsyouthrally.net.

MLC, DMLC, and NWC Reunion Week-

end—July 24-26. Site, Martin Luther

College, New Ulm, Minn. Celebrating five-year incremental class reunion

(2004, 1999, and all previous classes

ending in four or nine). Steve Balza, 507-

217-1731; alumni@mlc-wels.edu. Web

site, www.mlc-wels.edu/home/alumni.

Prayer conference—Aug. 14-15. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Hosted by WELS Prayer Institute. Steve Witte, 920-499-7405. Reg Draheim, 920-497-1000.

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Picture this



Last year, Pastor Wayne Rouse snapped this photo as he went to visit one of his members who "lives in Paradise" (also known as North Dakota).

Submitted by Wayne Rouse

Send pictures to **Picture This**, Forward in Christ, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; pic@sob.wels.net. On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.

Don't worry about tomorrow . . .

"See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these" (Matthew 6:28-34).

Jesus goes on to reassure us that if God clothes the flowers and feeds the birds, he certainly will watch out for us. There is no need to worry! Worry can lead to stress, depression, and feelings of hopelessness. God doesn't want that for his children. Instead, he tells us to cast all our anxiety on him because he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

In today's world, it's easy to get bagged down with busy schedules and hectic day-to-day routines. Here are some helpful hints to help you eliminate stress and worry from your life so you can focus on the blessings God's given you.

Talk it out. If you're feeling overwhelmed, talk to a family member, a friend, or your pastor.

Don't worry about things you can't control, like the weather of the economy. Instead, work on the things you can control, like having a positive attitude and managing your time wisely.

Strengthen your relationships. When things get busy, sometimes friends and even family members can fall to the wayside. Take time to visit someone, send a card, or make a phone call.

Do what you love. God has given us all different talents and interests. Make time to pursue a hobby or consider using your talents to serve others.

Take care of your body. Eat a healthy diet, exercise, and get enough sleep.

Become more flexible and spontaneous. Don't be afraid to take advantage of the unique opportunities God places in front of you.

Relax! Spend a little bit of time each day unwinding, whether it's reading a good book, taking a bath, or enjoying God's beautiful creation.

Read the Bible. Strengthen your relationship with God and be refreshed and uplifted by his Word (Matthew 6:25-34; Psalm 55:22; Nahum 1:7; Psalm 94:19; 1 Peter 5:7).

And pray! Fill me with joy, dear Lord. Don't let me be distracted by worldly cares, but direct my eyes, mind, and soul to your Word. Give me understanding. Free me from needless worry, and give me joy as I live for you by following your will. For his name's sake, hear me. *Amen.*

Thou shall

I was at a major chain bookstore the other day when, on my way out the door, one of the super-discounted sale books in the entrance-way caught my eye. I stood there for a few minutes flipping through the book.

As I put the book back on the shelf, it occurred to me how easy it would be for me to steal that book. I was six inches from the front door. Another heavy door separated me from the rest of the store. No employees—for that matter, no other people—could possibly see me. I wouldn't have even had to slip it under my coat. No one would have noticed or even cared. After all, the book was marked down to \$4.95 from an original price of \$30. It was costing the store more to move these books from place to place than it would ever hope to make actually selling them.

Why didn't I steal the book? Was it because the flip-through told me I didn't really want it? Was it because I was afraid I would get caught? Was it because the cup of coffee I was drinking was a good enough substitute for the cheap thrill of petty larceny? Was it because it's *wrong* to steal? Was it because it's not what Jesus would have done?

When I was in kindergarten, I stole something. I took some change out of the box on the teacher's desk where the milk money was collected. I made up a huge story to tell my parents—something about a bunch of relay races in class, with nickels, dimes, and quarters for prizes. I was on the blue team. My parents, naturally, weren't very happy with me. I distinctly remember the shyness, embarrassment, discomfort, and outright pain involved in the private conference with my teacher where I was "given the opportunity" to "fess up."

Law, punishment, character?

I think that might be why I didn't take the book. Maybe that formative experience so deeply impressed upon my little

six-year-old psyche that *stealing is wrong* and there was no way I was going to steal anything ever again, even 30 years later.

It's important to note the italicized phrase in the last paragraph: *stealing is wrong*. My parents must have done a good job teaching me that lesson. But it occurs to me that that's not all my brush with justice must have taught me. There must have also been a correlative lesson that got passed on, or maybe an earlier, more fundamental lesson that I learned from somewhere else: I don't do things that are wrong. This lesson is also important, even more important than the lesson that stealing is wrong.

As a kindergartner I received all sorts of age-appropriate punishments for my thievery, but nothing was ever said about the lies I fabricated to hide the stealing. I was never, to the best of my recollection, ever punished for the huge "blue team" lie I had told my parents.

I find this particularly interesting because I know that I was, and to some extent still am, a proficient and relatively prolific liar. Somehow, somewhere, I missed the memo that *lying is wrong*. And so it's always a struggle for me. Every day I try to win the battle with my old Adam, to resist the easy lie and tell the truth, but it's not as easy for me as not stealing.

So, why not take the book? I drove home reflecting on that question, and I've been pondering it ever since. It wasn't because I didn't want it. It wasn't out of fear of punishment. I'd like to think it was out of respect for the commandment, but it might have been even deeper than that. I think that I really didn't *want* to steal the book.

There's a common bit of church-sign wisdom that reminds us, "What you do today decides who you are tomorrow." That's a good reason not to steal a five-dollar book, isn't it? Today I take the book; tomorrow I'm a thief. And although the blood of Jesus cleanses

NOT . . .

Why not steal?
What motivates us to
do the right thing?

Chris J. Pluger

me from that sin just like every other sin I've ever committed, I'm still a thief. A forgiven thief, but a thief nonetheless. And I don't want to be a thief.

But it's more than just a matter of me making character-building choices. "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Romans 9:16). Morality is more than just the cumulative effect of the positive exercising of will power. Morality is more than just doing good and not doing bad. It's more than avoiding punishment. The Bible reminds us that "those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Romans 8:29). Morality is God conforming us to the likeness of his Son.

Being like Christ

Make no mistake, stealing is against the moral law, and for that reason it's wrong. But even worse than that, stealing is detrimental to my faith. It is a sidestep, a dangerous detour from the path to heaven. I am sanctified, made holy and Christlike by grace through faith, apart from any works of my own lest I should boast. But works of my own can certainly tarnish that Christlikeness in me, turn me away from the path to heaven, and generally undo the work that God has graciously accomplished in my life. I have a hideous strength to fight back against God's gracious working.

But praise be to God, for he gives me the gospel, the power of God in Word and sacrament, that kills my sinful desire and ability to resist him. As Luther said, "A new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever" (Luther's Catechism).

What does it mean to be Christlike, to be conformed to the image of God's Son? I do know that being Christlike starts with God, not with our choice, effort, or decision. God is the one who changes us from within. He conforms us to the likeness of his Son and makes us "partakers of the divine nature"

(2 Peter 1:4 KJV) through Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Being Christlike is more than just seeking to avoid temptation. It's wanting to do the right thing. Being Christlike is more than just not stealing. It's actually not wanting to steal. Being Christlike means knowing what is wrong and not wanting to do wrong things. All day, every day.

Stealing is detrimental
to my faith. It is a
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to heaven.

Am I being conformed to the likeness of God's Son? Am I doing the good works prepared in advance for me to do? Am I becoming a "partaker of the divine nature" by faith in Christ? By grace, though the working of the Holy Spirit in my life, I can confidently hold God to his promises and say yes to those questions.

I didn't walk away from that book so I would become more like Jesus. I walked away from that book because I am more like Jesus—more like him than I was before, but not as like him as I someday will be.

*Chris Pluger is a member at
Resurrection, Centerville, Ohio.*



MY STORM

I WAS UNWED AND PREGNANT, BUT GOD'S LOVING FORGIVENESS AND GUIDANCE SHELTERED ME AND BROUGHT ME PEACE.

Katrina N. Meinel

It was a stormy February afternoon. The thunderclouds were black as night, and the rain was coming down with force. Not outside. No, outside was a cool, sunny, winter day. But my life had just entered a storm.

It was still a blur in my mind. "You're pregnant." The words were still registering when I heard the doctor tell me I had two choices: "You can either keep this baby. It will change your life forever. You won't be able to finish school and have fun with your friends. Or you can terminate it."

"No, no," I heard myself saying. "I'm keeping it." I walked out into the waiting room, dazed. I looked at my boyfriend and decidedly said, "Let's go."

We got into his car and headed to my pastor's house. There was a lot of tears, a lot of praying, a ton of guilt. My pastor reminded us of our forgiveness through Christ and our wonderfulness, though unplanned, opportunity to bring a life into this world.

It was time to tell my parents and my sister. The thunder was rolling; I was sure my dad could hear the boisterous booms within my heart. My dad was furious. How could his little girl betray our Lord? I felt horrible and frightened.

A WEDDING

I had waited for this day my whole life. I was born to be a wife and a mother. I couldn't wait to get married and have babies. That was my dream job. And here I was, employed before the interview. Not how I had pictured it. There was no smiling and rejoicing when grandparents-to-be were told the

news. There was no cute story to tell of how I found out I was expecting. There was no excited anticipation for the birth. Just disappointed faces, dreadful news, and humiliation.

The next four months were a mix of college courses, wedding plans, and prenatal doctor visits. Why were we so stupid? Why didn't we just get married first? Those questions kept running through my mind as I stood looking in the mirror deciding on a wedding dress, but unable to see past my bulging midsection. I wanted it perfect. I wanted the perfect dress, on the perfect day, with the perfect ceremony and celebration. I wanted a perfect wedding and a glorious honeymoon followed by a nice sunny day when we told our families we were expecting. But how can a wedding be perfect when those getting married aren't?

FORGIVENESS IN JESUS

My husband and I were 18 years old when we began dating. We both came from a strong WELS background, and we knew the rules: "You should not commit adultery." Though we had dated a mere five months, we were committed to each other. We spoke with our parents about getting married, but both sets of our parents said the same thing: "You are too young. You don't know what you want yet. Finish school first."

Despite their experienced advice, we still wanted to get married. We acted as if we were. God couldn't possibly be speaking to us when he says, "The marriage bed [should be]

kept pure" (Hebrews 13:4). We were committed to each other; it was as if we were already married. God knew that, and he couldn't possibly despise our actions. So we had sex. I was late the very next month.

We were foolish to think that we were above the law of God. We know that now. The Lord despised our actions, hated our lack of self-control, painfully watched every pleasurable moment. And yet he loves us. His love pulled us back to his promises. We found that even in our failures, he is there. I find such comfort in the words of 1 Corinthians 6:11, "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." There is no greater source of peace. I am forgiven. Though the storm in my life was soaking me through, it could not cleanse me of my guilt. Only God could, and he did.

LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

It has been four years since that storm blew through my life. True to the doctor's prediction, my life did change. My husband and I started out working many hours. Our daughter was at a sitter's for up to ten hours a day, and I felt as though I did not know her. Every four weeks my husband had to rotate shifts and often worked thirteen 12-hour days in a row. We found out that carbon monoxide was slowly leaking into our small apartment, and we felt horrible for bringing our daughter into such an environment. To top it off, our relationship with our parents was still a bit shaky. They loved their granddaughter, but they still weren't sure my husband and I could make it work.

Yes, it felt as though the thunderclouds were rumbling above us. As we struggled to make our dreams come true, we clung to the Lord and our church family. Our pastor often reminded us of the sermon text for our wedding ceremony: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make

your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5,6).

And indeed he did. I completed my associate's degree through online courses shortly after our daughter was born, and just this past May, my husband graduated from college. The Lord has led us through the storm, always faithful to his promise in Jeremiah 29:11, "'I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'"

And the blessings abound! We now have two beautiful, healthy daughters. My husband has a nice job with challenging yet fulfilling work. I am able to stay home with our girls in our wonderfully efficient rental. And our parents' affection and pride for us is evident and overflowing. Yes, my life did change, but there is not a day that goes by when I don't praise the Lord for guiding us through all those changes.

As our baby heads into her preschool years, I often find myself pondering the day when she will ask why her birthday is a mere four months after our wedding day. What will my answer be? What can I possibly say? "Daddy and I were wrong, but there was never a day we didn't want you." Will that work? Will that make her understand that it's not okay to have sex with anyone until you are married? I pray that when that day comes, the Lord will give me the right words.

When I think back on that stormy night and picture myself—rain pouring down, lightning flashing around me, crying out to my God for help—I am calm, for "he stilled the storm to a whisper" (Psalm 107:29) and will "remember [my] sins no more" (Jeremiah 31:34).

Katrina Meinel is a member at St. Paul, Muskego, Wisconsin.



Philip, Grace, Katrina, and Noel Meinel.

**WE WERE
FOOLISH TO
THINK THAT
WE WERE
ABOVE THE
LAW OF GOD.**



Mark Schwab

How do you define success?

By most standards, his ministry was not much of a success.

Becoming a pastor or a missionary was never in his plans. In fact, it was the furthest thing from his mind. Preparing himself for a high-powered secular career, he attended a prestigious university. But sometime later, in spite of his reluctance, his mind was changed. God called him.

From almost the beginning, he was embroiled in public controversies and disagreements with his coworkers and fellow believers. He never stayed long in any one congregation. No matter where he went, there were those who had no use for him and who did all they could to make his life and work miserable. Often he would leave for his next congregation quickly, painfully aware that not everyone appreciated his efforts.

He never viewed himself as a particularly gifted preacher; he often stated that he was not up to the task in terms of his speaking skills. He looked at his own personal failures and remarked to himself and others that he was not worthy to be doing this work. He struggled continually with some kind of ailment that made his life and work difficult. He never mentioned what it was.

One congregation seemed to fall apart shortly after he left, with members becoming tolerant of open immoral behavior, quarreling with one another, and easily adopting teachings and doctrines that were not true.

In the end, he died alone, and the world did not much notice.

His was not a very successful ministry—unless you measure “success” in ministry by other standards. This pastor and missionary who might be judged as a failure by any human standards was the apostle Paul.


Paul would agree that his personal abilities and accomplishments were

few and far between. But he did not—nor should we—measure the success of his ministry in those terms. This was the man who recognized that the words he preached were not *his* words; they were the words of God himself. He recognized that the power of his message was not in himself but in the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. His was a ministry of the cross, proclaiming that God’s way of saving people through the cross, while foolish to the world, was nothing less than the wisdom and power and love of God.

Paul’s purpose was not to meet the “felt needs” of people but to lead them to see their real need: the need for forgiveness and redemption. His mission was not to make the church grow in terms of numbers; his mission was to pummel hardened sinners with God’s law in all its condemning force and then follow with the precious news of forgiveness in Jesus. He knew that his role was to plant the seed of the gospel in hearts; others would water it and watch the Holy Spirit make it grow and flourish after he was gone. His confidence rested in knowing that it was God and God alone who would make it grow.

What kind of pastor do you want to serve as the shepherd of your congregation? A powerful and dynamic speaker who draws people by the sheer force of his personality? Someone with fantastic organizational skills? Someone who is up on all the latest techniques for connecting with people? Someone who seems to be “successful”? Or would you prefer someone like the apostle Paul: always preaching Christ, always pointing to the cross, always demonstrating a love for souls by faithful proclamation of law and gospel?

Success, I suppose, all depends on how you define it.



To die is gain

Bruce A. McKenney

When I came into work that day, many of my coworkers were crying. Eventually, I found out why. One of our coworkers who had gone off to college that fall had committed suicide. He had taken some poison.

As I thought about Joe and what he did, I remembered some discussions we had while working together. Since I was studying to become a Lutheran pastor, he had asked about what I believed. I shared the simple message, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." He replied, "All one has to do is believe in Jesus and he will be saved? That's too easy." "That's what makes it so wonderful," I said to him. "God did it all and gives salvation as a free gift through faith in Jesus." Joe knew the way to eternal life.

God will forgive the sin of suicide

So what happened to Joe? Will he be in heaven? Or does one who commits suicide automatically go to hell like Judas? These are questions Christians often ask. So do pastors. The answers are especially important to families that have been touched by suicide.

Suicide is murder. There is no question about it. God alone has the right to end life. Our times are in his hands. So when someone takes his own life, he takes into his own hands what belongs in God's hand. We must condemn suicide as murder just as God's law does. Laying down one's life to save another is an act of love. Taking one's own life is the most selfish act anyone can commit!

But we must also remember that suicide is a sin for which Jesus died. Scripture clearly teaches, "The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). These

are truths we know: suicide is sin and Jesus paid for all sins, yes, even the sin of taking one's own life.

There must be repentance

But what about heaven and hell? Can a person who commits suicide go to heaven? The answer has to be that only unbelief sends people to hell. But that answer leads to the next question, "Can a person who commits suicide have faith in his/her heart?" Sometimes there is opportunity for a troubled heart to turn to Jesus for forgiveness. In such cases there is no question about heaven. But who knows if that happened? Only God and that individual know. Therefore, we must put the best construction on such situations and do all we can to comfort a grieving family searching for answers. The best place to find that comfort is at the foot of Jesus' cross and in the precious promises of a merciful God.

That's where I found my comfort. I trust Joe remembered what we had talked about while working together. I pray that before the poison took his life, he turned to Jesus and found forgiveness. I hope that when I die and go to heaven, Joe will be waiting there to greet me.

Contributing editor Bruce McKenney is pastor at St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wisconsin.

This is the seventh article in a ten-part series on death and dying.

Author's note: What was most shocking about Joe's suicide is that he had communicated his intentions and we weren't listening. Experts say that most people who commit suicide tell others before they do it. They may say things such as: "I wish I were dead; I'm just going to end it all; my life isn't worth living!" If you hear a despondent person say such things, take note and take action.

Can a person who commits suicide go to heaven?
Only unbelief sends people to hell, and sometimes there is opportunity for a troubled heart to turn to Jesus for forgiveness.



Another good-bye

Shakespeare wrote, "Parting is such sweet sorrow." His thought carried no Christian hope in the face of death. It was Juliet's sad good-bye to Romeo "till it be morrow" when they would see each other again.

But Shakespeare's quotations have a way of popping into one's mind in different contexts. The line slipped unexpectedly into my mind at the funeral of Harold Wicke. He was editor of this magazine when it was called *The Northwestern Lutheran*.

He would be embarrassed by any mention of his name in this column. But his funeral was another good-bye—another farewell for a believer in Jesus. I've attended more than a few. I remember some of them especially: Paul, Jerry, Don, Frank, Phoebe, and others.

I remember these funerals because they were good-byes to those who shared the heat of the day with me. We worked together and grew close. Some farewells were for those I did not know as well. Then I stood at a distance to pay my respects and say good-bye. For those who touched me, I sat quietly and felt tears well up in my eyes. At times those tears silently ran down my cheeks. Parting is sorrow.

I tried to hide those tears sometimes. I felt embarrassed by my tears because I have great comfort in Jesus for those departing believers and for myself. But I suppose I should not be ashamed of the ways these believers touched my life and how God used them in his kingdom. Jesus wept too at the death of his friend Lazarus.

At these times, I am filled with sorrow over my own loss and the empty space left behind. But I am filled with sorrow also when I see the eyes of family mem-

bers filled with tears. These family members, as they walk slowly to the graveside, remain on life's journey. Their shoulders seem to droop a bit as they carry a sudden invisible burden. Tears well up again, this time shed for them in their sorrow.

The sorrow of parting is repeated in every life sooner or later. My tears are not unique. Death comes to all regardless of their station in life. Believers must walk through this "valley of the shadow of death" just like everyone else. Yet we have a sweet hope that others do not have. Funerals for us are good-byes with the real hope of a better tomorrow.

The sorrow is real, but it is overcome by the promises of our living risen Lord. Not only did he say that he had overcome death, but he also proved it. First, Jesus demonstrated his power by raising the daughter of Jairus and the youth of Nain. Second, he said he would rise on the third day. And he did. The bodies of the faithful lie in rest from their labors, but they will arise glorious and new when the Lord returns.

We have another reason to dry our tears. Our friend, our spouse, our child, our parent—all have left behind life's troubled journey and entered the presence of our Lord Jesus. By faith in Jesus and through his power, they are freed from pain, discomfort, and sorrow. Sometimes, as difficult as it is to say, we do not want them to return to our sorrow and misery.

No doubt I will travel again to pay my respects to another believer Jesus has called home. The sorrow may squeeze tears from my eyes. But I have hope in Jesus and so do the families and other friends left behind. We have the sweet promise of victory over death even as we face the sorrow of another good-bye.

THE APOSTLES

St. John the Evangelist: The elder

St. John was unique among the apostles: he died a natural death at an old age. The other apostles died as martyrs for Christ, but John lived for decades after the others had gone to glory. He lived so long that he could just sign his letters, "The elder" (2 John 1; 3 John 1). He lived so long that people wondered if he would ever die.

READ JOHN 21:20-25

²⁰Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") ²¹When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

²²Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." ²³Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

²⁴This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

²⁵Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

DIGGING INTO THE VERSES

1. The Bible calls John "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

What was the nature of their special bond? Look for some clues:

- Who was John? (See Matthew 27:56, then Mark 15:40, then John 19:25.)
- What was John? (See John 1:35; John 20:6-9; John 21:4-7.)
- Who would John be? (See John 19:26-28.)

2. Look at vv. 20-21. Jesus had just told Peter that he would stand firm to the end and die a noble martyr's death. Why did Peter then ask this question?
3. Why did Jesus answer Peter this way (v. 22)?
4. When John wrote his gospel, why did he make sure to dispel the rumors that he would never die? Why was this important for the believers?
5. Verse 25 tells us that John and the Holy Spirit were selective in telling us about Jesus' life. What insight and comfort do we find in John 20:31?
6. Peter learned that he would die a martyr; John had no idea what would happen to him. Which would you prefer? Why?
7. How would knowing your fate change your life? What does that tell you about your life of faith?

MORE ABOUT JOHN

After serving the Jerusalem church, John went to Ephesus and led the churches there for many years. The Emperor Domitian exiled him to the island of Patmos where John labored in the mines alongside criminals. On that island, God gave John the great vision that is the book of Revelation. Finally released, John returned to Ephesus where he died. The ruins of Ephesus and the traditional site of John's tomb still can be seen in Selçuk, Turkey. John's symbol in Christian art is the eagle because his writings soar to such great heights. The church celebrates the Feast of St. John the Evangelist each year on Dec. 27. The Gospel lesson for that festival is John 21:20-25.

Contributing editor Jonathan Schroeder is pastor at Faith, Shorsburg, Georgia.

This is the fourth article in a 12-part series on Jesus' apostles. Find this study and answers online after Feb. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net.





Mama's NEW ATTITUDE

Rachel Hartman

Even if it's tiring, going to church with children helps guide them down a Christ-centered path from early on.

When Trinity reached the one-year-old mark, Sunday mornings became a pain. Practically overnight, my baby that happily played and napped during church turned into an on-the-go toddler. It seemed like she needed a change of entertainment every three seconds.

I blamed part of it on the facility where we worshiped. The storefront our congregation gathered in was one long room, spanning ten feet by thirty feet. It had no nursery or other rooms. The only place for restless children was a sidewalk outside of church, just inches from a busy, dusty street.

And we spent a long time at church on Sundays. As a missionary daughter, Trinity was among the first to arrive and the last to leave. When others commented on her unruly behavior, part of me sympathized with my one-year-old. Our Bible classes and church services in Mexico tend to last a while. Three- to four-hour marathons on Sundays were long for my grown body, let alone her 20-pound frame.

Trinity would usually last about ten minutes inside and then throw a fit or want to run around. After trying to distract her, I would follow her outside. We'd roast on the sidewalk under the hot Torreón sun. When the temperatures started topping 100 degrees and my attempts to find shade failed, I associated Sundays with sweat, dirt, and tears.

My husband, the pastor of the congregation, noticed his daughter's behavior. While he empathized with my struggles, he also reminded me of the whole reason behind church. We were taking our girl to hear God's Word. Through our efforts, the seeds of truth were being planted in Trinity's little soul.

The real problem rested with me, not Trinity. My constant frustrations weighed heavily on me, so much that they drowned out the very reason to take her to church. After some evaluation, I came to a revealing conclusion: Mama needed an attitude change.

Deep down, I knew I had more reasons than ever before to go to church. Even if it's tiring, going to church with children helps guide them down a Christ-centered path from early on.

I took steps to make church a highlight of the week. I carved out down time for Trinity and myself before we left for church. Since I often missed the sermon, I set aside time during the week for personal devotion. During church, Trinity still was restless, but by remembering that I was pointing her to Christ, it was easier to handle.

Then one day, Trinity made it through the whole church service! The following Sunday, she did well once more and even clapped when we sang hymns she liked.

Sundays no longer find me in a sour mood. Part of this could be tied to Trinity's current extended attention span, but I feel the root of the change started with my own attitude. When it comes down to it, what better place could we be on Sunday mornings? A brunch or a baseball game may be fun, but they don't bring lasting results. The true message of salvation and the hope of eternal life are found at the cross.

And when Mama holds on to that attitude, it makes all the difference in the world for her kids.

Rachel Hartman and her husband, Missionary Mike Hartman, are serving in Torreón, Coahuila, Mexico.